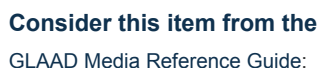


Think about it

'Transgender' vs. 'transgendered' – the great nomenclature debate engaged



PROBLEMATIC: "transgendered"
PREFERRED: "transgender"

The word **transgender** never needs the extraneous "ed" at the end of the word. In fact, such a construction is grammatically incorrect. Only verbs can be transformed into participles by adding "-ed" to the end of the word.

I hesitate to criticize what is in general a very useful guide, but on this issue, the guide is simply incorrect: 'transgendered' is clearly grammatically correct and 'transgender' is the term whose grammatical status is in question. It is certainly true that some transgendered people use 'transgender' as an adjective to describe themselves or others, but a review of the above will show that this is, strictly speaking, grammatically incorrect.

There are adjectives that we use to describe people that do not end in 'ed,' including 'Norwegian' or 'Chinese,' 'masculine' or 'feminine,' and 'gay' or 'lesbian,' not to mention 'bisexual.' But to point this out is simply to point out the diversity of adjectival constructions in the English language; in itself, it does not constitute an objection to the use of 'transgendered' as an adjective.

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COMMENTS

true about S/he's Not Heavy, Zie's My Non-Gendered Sibling: Why Gender-Neutral Pronouns Don't Work for Me

Mon, 15.08.2011 18:23
You forgot to mention that in China
they no longer have a gender-
neutral pronoun in writing. Ever
since the mid 20 [...]

gay weddings about Judge Rules DOMA Unconstitutional
Sun_06/03/2011_07:06

Thank god for Mass. Let's just hope by the time it gets to the supreme court the court will be ready to pass it's [...]

LaLaTink about I "Heart" Hunter

Tue, 01.02.2011 00:51
I never hated him. I also never got why people hated him as I always loved his sarcasm and humor
shrugs to each [...]

Ivan about HRC: Homosexual Men

Tortured and Killed in Iraq
Sun, 23.01.2011 18:38
Well, i think its religion,coz education
can only give u kno wledge of the
world. The relig ion is the thing that
qi [...]

Cory about L...is for Lame?

Thu, 09.12.2010 12:33
shane always has bad hair days .
seriously, she looks like th e grudge
sometimes. and she to tally isnt a
femme eithe []

'educate' person. I have been honored to accept numerous invitations to speaking engagements, but on none of those occasions have I ever said, "I am honor to accept your invitation to speak here," and if I had, my audience would almost certainly question my command of English grammar.

Adding an 'ed' to a verb to create an adjective is in fact a very common construction in English, and the fact that an adjective is created from a verb doesn't mean that it isn't an adjective. Similarly with 'transgendered.' When we talk about people, we ordinarily say that they are 'gendered,' using an adjective created by adding 'ed' to 'gender.' It would be both grammatically incorrect as well as bizarre to say that a child is 'gender,' while it makes perfect sense to say that a child is 'gendered.'

Now, I do use 'transgender' as an adjective to describe certain entities that are abstract, such as 'transgender law,' 'transgender studies,' and 'transgender community,' because it is the people -- not the law, the studies, or the community -- that are transgendered. So it is not at all inconsistent when I refer to myself as a 'transgendered woman' and also as a 'transgender activist,' because in the latter case, it is I who am transgendered, not my activism. Similarly, NYAGRA is a transgender organization, not a 'transgendered' organization, because an organization itself cannot be transgendered, only its members.

When the question of 'transgender' vs. 'transgendered' comes up within community, the most frequent objection I hear to the latter is that it seems to imply that something has been 'done to' the 'transgendered' person. Well, we are all gendered at birth, entirely without our consent; in that sense, we are all gendered; gender is in fact 'done to' us -- by our parents, our peers, and our society. But when we come out as transgendered, we do in fact engage in an act of re-gendering, as it were. Far from implying that something has been 'done to' someone, when an individual uses 'transgendered' as a self-descriptor, it represents a conscious act of self-naming and affirmation.

There is a subtler and more sophisticated argument in favor of 'transgender,' which is that linguistic usages are social constructions and that ultimately, whatever usage society adopts is correct. An example of this would be 'e-mail' used as a term not merely to designate electronic mail as a whole, but an individual message. I feel rather old-fashioned and even vaguely curmudgeonly when I say 'e-mail message' to refer to an individual message rather than the shorter and all-too-common 'e-mail' (as in, "Did you get the last e-mail I sent you...?"). But it is also true that the mere fact that adoption of a usage as conventional does not make grammatically what is demonstrably grammatically incorrect according to the rules of grammar that are still standard for that language; adoption of a grammatically incorrect usage as conventional simply complicates the status of the grammatical structure of the language and makes the language more inconsistent in that regard. In any case, we have not reached the point where 'transgender' as an adjective to describe people has become standard, much less universally accepted both within the transgender community and outside it, and so even this most sophisticated argument in favor of 'transgender' is not persuasive.

So as a transgender activist, but even more as a transgendered woman, I

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So as a transgender activist, but even more as a transgendered woman, I would encourage GLAAD to correct this reference on-line and in its publications. For me, it is ultimately the conceptual and political implications of this debate over usage that weigh most heavily. When I say, "I'm transgendered," I am saying, in effect, "I have transgendered myself." I have re-envisioned myself as an openly transgendered woman in the face of a society that is generally hostile to the very idea. I have embraced the usage 'transgendered' because it represents a conscious act of self-naming and affirmation, an act that is central to the process of empowerment that is at the heart of the transgender movement.

Posted by [Pauline Park](#) at [23:24](#) | [Comments \(10\)](#) | [Trackbacks \(0\)](#) | [ShareThis](#) | [Top Exits](#)

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C O M M E N T S

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I'm going to respectfully disagree with you on this one -- not necessarily because of actual grammar issues -- for me it's the "perceived" grammar issues.

One reason for not going with "transgendered" is because doesn't sound like the rest of the LGBT terms. No one is gayed, lesbianed, or bisexualled, so transgendered seems out of place. Granted, this isn't a very significant reason, but the "-ed" bugs me in the LGB & T context.

The other reason is because "transgendered" sounds like the past tense of "transgender." In a world of ex-gay and ex-transsexual/ex-transgender people (i.e. Jerry Leach, Sy Rogers, and Danny Blackwell), I don't like the sound of a "past tense" sounding term to help feed their idea that the state of being transgender is a choice.

[#1 Autumn Sandeen \(Homepage\)](#) on 2007-04-09 15:44 ([Reply](#))

Another bold move forward for the adjectival community, Pauline!

But for me, the simplicity of "transgender" trumps. I just don't like the look of the word: "transgendered". Sounds like something created by a mad scientist, like genetically modified foods. On the meaning front, I'm not sure how many transgender people would agree that they have "transgendered" themselves.

You are my right-hand woman, Pauline, when it comes to fatigue arguments and exhaust discussions. A culture person extraordinaire, and in my age bracket too! But I

do prefer "transgender" for its syllable thriftiness.

[#2 Jillian Todd Weiss \(Homepage\) on 2007-04-10 07:01 \(Reply\)](#)

I don't follow the logic of -ed meaning X or not anymore. To me it's more like if you were baptisED that doesn't mean you are no longer Christian or if you were circumcisED you now suddenly have foreskin because the -ed made it past tense.

True, -ed indicates the past tense which means it has occurred- not that it is no longer valid.

[#3 Anonymous on 2007-04-10 20:11 \(Reply\)](#)

"One reason for not going with "transgendered" is because doesn't sound like the rest of the LGBT terms. No one is gayed, lesbianed, or bisexualed, so transgendered seems out of place."

the rest of the lgbt spectrum has to do with who they sleep with, not who they are. fact is, trans people **are** different than the glb people. trans is not a sexual orientation, where lgb descriptors are. and the reality is, transgendered people are out of place, even within the lgb community.

that said, i'll typically say that i'm "trans". that eliminates the whole "ed" argument.

[#4 nexyjo \(Homepage\) on 2007-04-17 05:01 \(Reply\)](#)

FINALLY! Someone who agrees with me on this and has the education to back it up. I'm better at English than the average american, but I didn't know all of the rules to back up my claim of "saying 'i'm transgender' just sounds wrong!" thanks for this article, i'll be sure to point anyone who insists on being transgender.

[#5 Josh on 2009-11-02 21:49 \(Reply\)](#)

I agree wholeheartedly with the author's points. Thank you thank you thank you thank you!!!!

In reply to the first two comments, the problem lies not in the "ed" but in the "transgender." Actually, "transgendered" (or "transgender") sounds a lot like "bisexual." That's why people who are bi describe themselves as ... that's right, "bi." So if you don't want to sound so stuffy, just say "trans."

[#6 Alyssa on 2009-11-03 00:10 \(Reply\)](#)

thank you for your very well written blog post!

in response to the first comment: um, to say that "no one is gayed, lesbianed, or bisexualed" and that that is why we should be using the ridiculously grammatically incorrect term "transgender" is just plain ignorant. "gay," "lesbian," and "bisexual" are already adjectives--not nouns. "gender," i think everyone can agree, is a NOUN. as such, if you want to make it into an adjective (like the noun "Lesbos"), you have to do something to it--in this case, add an "-ed," and in the case of "Lesbos," take off the end and add an "-ian." it's really very basic.

i think that discrimination against trans people is horrible, but perverting the rules of the English language is not going to help the cause; it's just going to make the person who does it sound badly uneducated and ignorant.

just because language evolves in illogical directions doesn't mean we have to give up just yet!

[#7 oshkin on 2010-02-23 19:02 \(Reply\)](#)

I don't agree. Just because you can add 'ed' onto a verb to make it an adjective, doesn't mean you can add 'ed' onto an adjective to make it a verb. That logic makes no sense.

I also disagree that being transgender is not something done to you, it is not an action to take or be taken. It is a descriptive state.

Regarding your example of "...a child is 'gendered.'" A child is gendered? I've never heard that. What does it mean? A child has a gender. Gender is a descriptive state of being, but it is not an action.

I will agree that "transgendered" is entering our vernacular as a neologism, but that doesn't mean it is now the appropriate term.

When we come out as transgender, we do not "re-gender". We can choose to transition to a new gender role, but our gender never changes. Further, many never transition, therefore they do not "re-gender" either.

It just bugs me because being transgender is what I am, not what I do.

[#8 Carla Lewis \(Homepage\)](#) on 2010-03-03 18:00 ([Reply](#))

Transgender is a noun, like man and woman. We would not say that someone is manned or womanned. Likewise, we would not say that someone is maled or femaleed. A person may be male, female, intesex, transgender, and so forth.

[#9 Kevin](#) on 2010-06-23 16:53 ([Reply](#))

Well, in accordance with both the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association (NLGJA) and the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), "transgender" is an adjective.

GLAAD goes further in its grammatical definitions of the term, indicating on page 10 of its GLAAD Media Reference Guide that "transgendered" is "problematic". (- <http://www.glaad.org/document.doc?id=99> -)

Because I try to stay within journalism standards, I tend to stick to what the styleguides tell me is the standardize way to use terminology -- that is, for example, why I personally use "LGBT" instead of "GLBT."

[#10 Autumn Sandeen \(Homepage\)](#) on 2010-07-16 18:01 ([Reply](#))

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